

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

Max Rothmel stood and watched the faces before him. He liked to study them. To him they were books. Beneath gray smiles he could read of hollow hearts. Beneath the happiest looking face he read of a yearning for something higher and better.

Some one touched him on the shoulder. He turned and met an outstretched hand.

"How are you, old fellow?" cried a glad honest voice. "You didn't think of seeing me here to-night, did you?"

"I really did not," answered Rothmel. "But I am glad to see you, just the same, for all I did not expect it," and the two men shook hands warmly, with a welcoming smile in their faces.

Max Rothmel and Roy Kirk were childhood friends. Damon and Pythias, some called them. They were together a great deal. Rothmel was not the man to give his friendship to everybody; when he met Roy Kirk he liked him, and on a better acquaintance he found that there were noble qualities in his character which he could help develop. Kirk was a man who could appreciate the friendship which such a man as Rothmel could give, and he was grateful for it.

They stood there and watched the scene. Suddenly Kirk started.

"I see Miss Wier is here," he said. "I have been looking for her and have just discovered her. She is sitting in that bay window. Isn't she lovely?"

Rothmel looked in the direction Kirk indicated. In the recess of a deep window, filled with blossoming plants, a woman sat. She was fair of face, with a soft rose color in her cheeks. Her hair was of a tawny gold, with white flowers holding it back from the face it framed. A dress of thin, floating stuff, of pale sea-green, with white, frosty lace at throat and wrists, heightened the exquisite beauty of which Sybil Wier was the possessor.

"She is a beautiful woman," answered Rothmel. "But there seems something lacking about her face, after all. It is cold."

"If I were an artist, I would paint her as she looks now. She would make a beautiful picture of spring," said Kirk, watching her with his heart in his face. Everybody knew that he was in love with Miss Wier.

"She hasn't warmth enough about her for an ideal of Summer," answered Rothmel. "Summer is spring with a soul in it. Miss Wier seems to me a woman without a soul, in one sense of the word. I use the word in the meaning which implies a strong, deep passion. That which gives life a zest, and something to live and work for; she doesn't look to me like a woman who has ever felt any very strong and earnest impulses. She hasn't awakened to knowledge of herself yet. When she does, the soul will come into her face, and the heart will be a thing of life."

"I think she is the loveliest woman I ever knew," persisted Kirk.

"Don't say that," answered Rothmel, with a smile. "Your face tells as much."

Just then Miss Wier turned her wonderful eyes toward them, and seeing Roy, beckoned him to her side.

"There goes young Kirk," a gentleman said near Rothmel. "He is the latest of Miss Wier's victims. She cares no more for him than she did for Lander, and Lander had wealth to recommend him, which Kirk has not. It must be she wins hearts for the amusement of the thing. She has had the most eligible offer of the season and refused it."

Watching them, Rothmel saw Kirk and Miss Wier go off toward the conservatory. Half an hour later, in the hall, he met his friend. But the light had vanished from his face.

"I was deceived in her, Rothmel," he said, grasping his friend's hand. "She did not care for me; I was only a poor, blind dupe. Pity me, Max! I loved that woman as I could never love another one, and the blow she gave me just now is a cruel one."

"I do pity you," Rothmel said. "Forget her; she was not worthy of you."

"It is easier to say forget than do it," Kirk answered. "And I believed her to be the truest woman in the world! How could I be so blind?"

Poor Roy Kirk! He wasn't the first man in the world who has been blinded by a woman's witching smiles. I don't think he was the last.

The delicious strains of Weber's Last Waltz floated out upon the night, and the dancers floated off down the room to its weird, sweet melody.

Max Rothmel stood apart from the lookers-on, but felt that he was not alone, without looking up.

Some one touched him on his arm. Then he lifted his eyes and saw Sybil Wier standing by his side, radiant as a vision of the moonlight, in white, with pale, pure pearls shimmering among the lace upon her bosom, and looping up the yellow masses of her hair. A soft color tinged her cheeks. Her eyes were full of radiant fire. Looking at her, earnestly, Rothmel thought that at last the soul had come into the woman's face, and his heart beat a trifle faster as he told himself this.

"I am dying to dance this waltz," she said. "It is my favorite. Aren't you going to ask me?"

"Shall we waltz?" he smiled, and then they glided off among the whirling dancers, his arm about her waist, his hands upon her cheeks, and his eyes upon her beautiful face, into which that indescribable something had come, which Rothmel called a soul.

The yellow strands of her hair swept across his breast. There was something in the touch of it that thrilled him strangely.

Once she lifted her eyes to his, as if some influence she could not resist compelled her to do so. But beneath his gaze she dropped them, while a wave of color stained her cheeks.

Max Rothmel smiled, and there was triumph in his smile. At last (he told himself) he had won this woman's heart, and he held it in his hand, as she had held Roy Kirk's. He could

have a sweet revenge for the wrong she had done his friend.

The dance was done, and they strolled out, and down the path to the sea. The waves broke in upon the beach in a slow and solemn monotone. Far off along the white line of the horizon glowed, shadowy, saffron-gold. The strains of merry music came floating to them on the wind.

"I am going away to-morrow," he said. "I ought to have gone a month ago."

"Going away?" she said. "Not to be gone long, I hope, not very far away?"

"I am going to Europe, and I cannot tell how long I shall stay," he answered. "May be for a year—may be forever. I have nothing to keep me here."

He fancied that the woman's face paled at the words he uttered. Fancied, too, that she lifted her eyes to his because she could not resist the influence of his will. Oh! man, foolish in your wisdom, how little know you of this woman's heart!

"Will you miss me when I am gone?" he asked.

"Miss you?" she repeated the words slowly, while her eyes thrilled him with the magnetism of their glance. "You have been a very dear"—she hesitated a little at the word, and then went on; "a very dear friend to me, and I always miss my friends. How could you ask me such a question?"

Those strange, bright eyes of hers! They lured him on like will-o'-the-wisps. A strangely mingled look of triumph and defeat came into his face. He had won this woman's heart, he told himself; that look in her face was a confession of her love. He had striven to win that love, that he might throw it from him, as she had rejected Roy Kirk's; that he might cause her to feel what it was to love, and lose. But in his triumph of fancied success there was a curious sense of self defeat. It was as if his heart had played him false. Standing there by her whose heart he had striven to win for the sweet sake of an unmanly and cruel revenge, he felt that life was not complete unless it was sanctified by love. Could he tell himself honestly that, in spite of all his knowledge of her falsehood and cruelty, he did not love this woman!

But a thought of what Roy Kirk had suffered, and his lost faith in woman, came to him.

"I had a friend who loved a woman once," he said, and his voice seemed hard and far-off, even to himself. "He gave her as true and faithful a love as ever a woman won. But she thrust it aside, caring nothing for it when it was won. To-day he doubts the sincerity of any woman's love. He will never get over the pain which the bitter knowledge of her faithlessness caused him. I think you know who I mean. I can see that by your face. You have told me, not by words, by actions that speak more truthfully than any words can, that you love me. If I were to tell you that I did not want the love you give me, do you think you could understand how much Roy Kirk suffered?"

"You are cruel!" she cried, "so cruel!"

A great yearning to clasp her in his arms stirred in his breast. He thought he had triumphed, but his heart had been the price of his triumph; and, after all, what a pitiful thing it was!

Could he go away and forget her! Forget her!

He turned suddenly, as one does who turns from a great temptation, and strode away across the white sands.

"Max!" she cried, "come back! Do not leave me in this way!"

He paused, wavering; then he wheeled about, came back and caught her in his arms and kissed her.

"I cannot give you up!" he cried passionately. "Love is too strong to fight against. Oh! I will love you. I will not let you go!"

"You love me?" she said softly.

"Yes, I love you," he answered. "I hate you, and I love you."

She laughed softly.

"If Paul Darryl were to hear you say that I am quite sure he would question your right to say anything of the kind."

"We are to be married next winter, you know."

Every drop of color faded from Max Rothmel's face.

"Woman!" he cried hoarsely. "Have you deceived me, as you did Roy Kirk?"

"You deceived yourself," she answered with a smile. "Don't take it to heart too much. Men ought to get over these things as easily as women do."

He turned away with a curse on his lips, this time, and she did not call him back.

"Poor fool!" she said, as his steps grew faint down the shore. "He ought to have known better than to play with fire!"

A Woman's Terrible Oath.

From the San Francisco Argonaut.

Most women say "damn" when they get mad. It is not a virile or a venomous damn. Its being quite intransigent may take the harm out of it, for they never damn anything or anybody. They simply emit the expulsive itself with considerable force and brevity, and with a triumphant satisfaction in their faces of having done something enormously wicked. But they always say it. A young lady with a pale, wrapt, angelic sort of a face occupied the adjoining divan to mine in the Turkish bath. While I was admiring her as one of the pale, high-bred type of girls, she went out into the massage-room to cool for a moment, and, slipping upon the wet marble, fell prone upon the floor. With the readiness of habit she exclaimed: "Hellity-devility-cussedly-damn!"

UBET.

The Tricks They Play on Traveling Tenderloin Out There.

Bill Nye in Detroit Free Press.

At Ubet, M. T., during the cold snap in January, one of the most inhuman outrages known in the annals of crime was perpetrated upon a young man who went West in the fall, hoping to make his pile in time to return in May and marry the New York heiress selected before he went.

While stopping at the hotel two frolicsome young women hired the porter to procure the young man's pantaloons at dead of night. They then sewed up the bottoms of the legs, threw the doctored garments back through the transom and squealed "Fire."

When he got into the hall he was vainly trying to stab one foot through the limb of his pantaloons while he danced around on the other and joined in the general cry of "Fire!" The hall seemed filled with people, who were running this way and that, ostensibly seeking a mope of egress from the flames, but in reality trying to dodge the mad efforts of the young man, who was trying to insert himself in his obstinate pantaloons.

He did not tumble, as it were, until the night watchman got a Babcock fire extinguisher and played on him. I do not know what he played on him. Very likely it was, "Sister, what are the wild waves saying?"

Anyway, he staggered into his room, and although he could hear the audience outside in their wild, tumultuous encore, he refused to come before the curtain, but locked his door and sobbed himself to sleep.

How often do we forget the finer feelings of others and ignore their sorrow, while we revel in some great joy!

He Did.

From the Detroit Free Press.

Talk about pretty girls—but she was a wild flower and no mistake! She got on the train to go over from Meridian to Vicksburg, and she was all alone. There was a sort of side movement among five or six men, but a drummer from a Philadelphia saddlery house got there first. He grabbed up his grip and walked square up to her seat and took possession of half of it without asking a question, and in ten minutes he seemed to be perfectly at home. She answered his questions briefly, and he had the hardest kind of work to keep up conversation, and as the train approached Jackson she suddenly said:

"I want to telegraph papa from here. Will you help me?"

"Oh! certainly. I have a blank in my pocket. Write your telegram and I will run into the office with it."

We missed him when the train started, but by and by he was found in the smoking-car, his hat crushed down and his nerves all on edge. When asked what had happened, he drew out the telegram which the girl had requested him to hand in. It read:

"Bring your shot-gun with you to pop over a drummer who has dreadfully annoyed me. Shoot to kill!"

"To think," he gasped, "that one so fair could be so murderous! Why, I'm all in a sweat; I want some of you to stand by me!"

We got his grip from the seat, traded hat and coats with him, and the way he slid from the depot when the train reached Meridian caused a hotel porter to observe:

"Well, now, but that white face belongs to an invalid and them legs to a deer! What sort of a coon can he be?"

Miss Nellie Hunt, daughter of the American Minister to Russia, who died Wednesday, is reported to be engaged to a Russian nobleman who is one of the household officials in the Imperial Palace.

Congressman Kelly of Philadelphia left his daughter Florence in Europe, where she will remain for some time as the rather lively and entertaining correspondent of one of the Washington newspapers.

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